

Traveller evictions planned by bailiffs

- Company has met with police for discussion
- Council hopes families will leave by choice

By JON AUSTIN

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BAILIFFS hired to clear the huge Dale Farm and Hovefields traveller camps have begun planning evictions.

The Echo can reveal Constant and Co, which was given the contract worth up to £2.5million in January, has met with police to draw up a plan of action.

It comes just weeks after Basildon Council said evictions were a last resort.

The authority said it had yet to meet police and was still pinning hopes on private negotiations aimed at getting families to



■ Eviction plans - Dale Farm traveller site

leave on their own accord. Essex Police spokeswoman Donna Veasey said: "Essex Police and its partners have had meetings to progress planning for the eviction."

"Some meetings have involved bailiffs appointed to carry out the task."

The Echo can also reveal that, far from leaving by choice, many families are digging their heels in at Dale Farm and there could

be more legal battles after campaigners put together new planning applications.

There are applications pending for seven of the site's pitches. Under a planning rule, applications which have previously been quashed must be reconsidered if more than two years have passed since the refusal.

Campaigner Grattan Puxon said: "We are drawing up applications for the most needy fami-

lies who it would be inhumane to evict. They are on seven pitches with elderly and sick occupants or children with health conditions, meaning they can't go on the road."

The applications are part of a wider plan to stave off eviction.

Mr Puxon added: "A number of families have been told they will qualify for bricks and mortar accommodation if evicted."

"They have lodged internal appeals asking for caravan site accommodation, which could end up in the county court."

Mr Puxon revealed he has also made a complaint to the council about its hiring of Constant & Co, after the bailiffs caused damage to private land during the eviction at Hovefields, in 2006.

He says he is prepared take the compliant to the Local Government Association in a bid to stop the firm being used.

Taxing question

BASILDON Council is refusing to say how many travellers at Crays Hill are being billed for council tax.

The authority claims releasing figures on the amount of pitches out of the 92 across the illegal and authorised site currently being billed, would breach their human right to privacy.

The Echo asked for the information under the Freedom of Information Act after a national gipsy spokesman said a headcount at the site found people were not being billed by the council.

We asked for no names or individual addresses, but just the basic figures of how many were billed and also in arrears.

The council's refusal stated: "The council feels the residents may become subject to harassment, intimidation or physical attack by those who are anti-traveller if this information were disclosed. The council considers releasing this information would be incompatible with our obligation to respect the travellers right to respect for their private life."

The Echo is appealing against the decision.

New planning applications are unlikely to halt action

COUNCIL chiefs say new planning applications are unlikely to stop an eviction, but cannot yet be certain.

Dawn French, head of environment, said: "It is unlikely the submission of another application would affect the timescales for a potential eviction, as the planning merits have been tested on several occasions.

"However, a more informed judgment would be required if, and when, such an application was received.

"In principle, enforcement action can be taken pending the determination of an application, but each situation would have to be considered on its individual merits."

In terms of traveller homelessness appeals, council leader Tony Ball said: "We are working actively with travellers to encourage them to make homelessness applications.

"Any decision a local authority makes with regard to a homelessness application can be reviewed."

GLENN STRIDES BACK INTO TOWN

A FAMILIAR face is back in town. Recently promoted Chief Supt Glenn Caton is once again heading up policing in Basildon and Thurrock.

Chief Supt Caton, who has nearly 30 years experience, started in the patch in 1981.

He rose through the ranks to Inspector for Basildon and Pitsea, Chief Inspector for Basildon and Superintendent covering both patches in 2007.

He left the area in 2008 to take up a position at Essex Police's Chelmsford headquarters, but is once again in the hot seat.

His priorities will be tackling serious and organised crime, cutting antisocial behaviour and improving people's confidence and satisfaction with police.

He said: "I really do know this area and the people well."

"I am proud to take the role of divisional commander. I have a great



■ Back on the patch - Glenn Caton
Picture: RON POULTER

affection for Basildon and Thurrock, which are unique and diverse areas."

Mr Caton is taking over from Chief Supt Maurice Mason who has taken up a position at police headquarters.

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